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## Bern Switzerland Symposium

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Talk to Bern Symposium

May 30-31, 1981

I greet you as progressive people, men and women and children in a spirit of love and joy, joy at seeing so many of you here today, joy at sharing with friends, compañeros and compañeras, joy at seeing the children here in Switzerland wearing the green ribbons in solidarity with the children in Atlanta. It is the same joy I feel tonight. I bring you greetings from the Programme to Combat Racism. I am with you today, above all, as a fighting black man from Chicago's Westside. When I was a child, like most US children, I had a "piggy-bank." "A SPARSCHWEINCHEN" Piggy banks are part of the international imagery which banks create for themselves. Banks and the banking industry are dependent upon creating and sustaining a public image. The image is that of shining strength, invulnerability, cleanliness - a certain dazzling whiteness - and neutrality. Another "nuage" which is part of the same picture is that banks exist to service people, like "coca-caca" - the Beaujolais of Texas! - banks sit there harmless, uninvolved only waiting to do the people's bidding.

Banks are not a super myth. Nor are they neutral institutions. They are instead decidedly political entities.

The decision of many banks throughout the world to loan to South Africa is a conscious decision. It goes beyond mere economic calculations. Bankers are generally intelligent people. (they clearly know how to count) They know the figures of repression in South Africa just as we do. Once a Canadian banker arguing with me told me I was wrong about the number of black children dying in the Transkei as opposed to white children. I had said it was 240 blacks out of every 1000 born as opposed to 12 whites per thousand. He corrected the figure to 282 out of every 1000!

The South African economy needs foreign capital. Regardless of how high the price of gold rises, the apartheid state - at times, in direct proportion to its intense and mandatory military build-up - must have a continued flow of foreign capital. As the JOHANNESBURG STAR recently stated: "International borrowing by South Africa has been growing at a much faster rate than generally appreciated".

But the \$854 million borrowed by South Africa in 1980 served another purpose as well. It is that of helping to legitimize the apartheid system of racial supremacy and assisting in the fortification of the apartheid state.

Foreign banks with facilities in South Africa such as UBS and SGB share a particularly close relationship with the government and the military. Some banks go far beyond participation in the marketing of South African defense bonds and local issues of Armscor, South Africa's weapons development and production unit. They also directly advise the government on "best business methods and other matters" including armaments purchase and manufacture. Bankers' claims to political neutrality ring hollow in the face of evidence such as this. A more realistic appraisal of bankers' logic was expressed by a prominent financial journalist when he said that "every international loan decision involves the making of a political judgement."



Today, as Ilva has already said, so clearly, so eloquently, the South African regime has placed itself in a state of war to protect the privileged position of a minority of its people. The forced removals, imprisonment, and killing of Africans within South Africa, the regular attacks upon Angola and Mozambique, and the development of nuclear weaponry which poses a threat to international peace and security are all part of a deliberate and desperate policy of the government to perpetuate apartheid. It is the bankers what Malcolm X used to call the blood suckers who make possible the South Africas and Bolivias, the Pinochets and Marcoses of this world. The decades of silence in the face of violence against black South Africans ring out far louder than the current whimpers of protest from the longtime guardians of a system whose days are numbered.

Bank loans are bullets for apartheid. Three days ago in Paris an International Conference on Sanctions Against South Africa attended by over 100 governments and hundreds of non-governmental organizations pointed out that today a consensus has been achieved.

"During the many years that the United Nations and the international community have considered the problem of apartheid in South Africa and its international repercussions, a consensus has emerged on the fact that apartheid is a crime against the conscience and dignity of mankind, incompatible with the provisions of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

The Conference also repeatedly highlighted the importance of public actions saying in its Final Declaration:

"The Conference emphasizes the importance of action by local authorities, trade unions, religious bodies, co-operatives and other non-governmental organizations, as well as men and women of conscience, to demonstrate their abhorrence of apartheid and their solidarity with the legitimate struggle of the oppressed people of South Africa and Namibia."

"It draws particular attention to the constructive value of consumer boycott, sports boycott, cultural and academic boycott, divestment from transnational corporations and financial institutions operating in South Africa."

But the challenge before us today is not that of sitting here telling these things to one another. Our challenge is engaging those thousands who have voted no on the "Etre Solidaire" referendum, thousands who continue silent and unmoved (like so many silent and unmoved before the Nazis extermination activities as depicted in 'La Barque est pleine').

The famous Pete Seeger sings a song that "the Banks are made of marble/ with a guard at every door." It's true that song. But it's equally true, as the song itself concludes, "but we can take those banks of marble that the peoplesweated for!"

That's the key, I think, we've got to take some of those lending banks and make them so dirty in people's minds so linked to the myriad deaths of children and mothers in South Africa that people decide to sever their connections, to move their money. People decide that even here in La Suisse, 10,000 miles from Soweto, they cannot just sit and watch it all on TV. People decide it makes sense to them to act. That's the key I think.

As I listened tonight it occurred to me that there is another level to all this. I think all of us must recognize that our very presence today, the array of people that have worked on this event today, the experience and the vision of all the people that we have had a chance to share this with today, this conference in and of itself constitutes a victory for the forces struggling for liberation and development. What is that victory? The essential part of our victory is unity. Black people, white people, yellow people, all people struggling in this country coming together in a sense of unity. We have a tremendous legacy of struggle in this world. As a man named Woody Guthry used to say all the time when he was asked what is your philosophy? He used to answer, "I want to sing songs that will prove to you that this is your world and if it knocks you pretty hard and sometimes it knocks you for a dozen loops. No matter how hard it runs you down or rolls you over, no matter what color or what size or how you are built, I want to sing the songs that make you take pride in yourself and take pride in your work." Paul Robeson used to say, the artist has before him but one choice, I think you have before you one choice. You must elect, as brother Robeson used to say, to fight either for slavery or freedom. You've got to make a choice. Let there be one song on all our lips as we leave tonight: SAME STRUGGLE, SAME FIGHT. A luta continua, a vitoria é certa.

Prexy Nesbitt